

TOGO 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution specifies the state is secular and protects the rights of all citizens to exercise their religious beliefs, consistent with the nation's laws. Religious groups other than Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims must register with the government. The procedure includes providing the religious credentials of the leadership, financial information, plans for religious facilities, and satisfying the government's ethical criteria. The Ministry of Territorial Administration (MTA) stated it did not approve pending applications nor accept new applications for registration from religious groups because the draft legislation regarding religious freedom had not passed.

Occasional disputes among religious groups were frequently related to noise caused by religious celebrations, or competition for parishioners among churches. Members of different religious groups frequently attended each other's ceremonies, and interfaith marriage remained common.

U.S. embassy officials met with the MTA and religious leaders to discuss religious freedom. Embassy officials provided literacy training to 300 imams in Muslim communities in the Central Region, which highlighted messages of peace and tolerance among all religions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 7.8 million (July 2016 estimate). According to a 2004 estimate by the University of Lome, the most recent data available, the population is 48 percent Christian, 33 percent traditional animist, 14 percent Sunni Muslim, and 5 percent followers of other religions. Roman Catholics are the largest Christian group at 28 percent, followed by Protestants at 10 percent, and other Christian denominations totaling 10 percent. Protestant groups include Methodists, Lutherans, Assembly of God, and Seventh-day Adventists. The 5 percent representing "other religions" includes Nichiren Buddhists, followers of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Bahais, Hindus, and persons not affiliated with any religious group. Many Christians and Muslims also engage in indigenous religious practices. Reliable figures are difficult to obtain due to migration.

Christians live mainly in the southern part of the country while Muslim populations are predominately in the central and northern regions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the nation is a secular state and ensures equality before the law of all citizens, regardless of religion, respects all religious beliefs, and prohibits religious discrimination. It provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship, the free exercise of religious belief, and the right of religious groups to organize themselves and carry out their activities consistent with the law, the rights of others, and public order.

The law does not recognize specific religions, but the government in practice recognizes Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam with their religious holidays observed as national holidays and religious leaders of these groups invited to government events. The law requires all other religious groups, including indigenous groups, to register as religious associations. Official recognition as a religious association affords these groups the same rights as those afforded to the three recognized religions, including import duty exemptions for humanitarian and development projects. Registering is not obligatory, but unregistered groups do not receive import duty exemptions or additional government benefits such as government-provided teachers for private schools.

Organizations apply for registration with the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the MTA. A religious group must submit its statutes, statement of doctrine, bylaws, names and addresses of executive board members, its leaders' religious credentials, a site use agreement and map for religious facilities, and description of its finances. It must also pay a registration fee of 150,000 CFA francs (\$240). Criteria for recognition include the authenticity of the religious leader's diploma and the government's assessment of the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order. The Directorate of Religious Affairs issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition for religious groups applying for registration. The investigation and issuance of formal written authorization usually takes several years.

By law religious groups must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those likely to block city streets or involve loud ceremonies in residential areas.

The public school curriculum does not include religion classes. There are many Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools, to which the government assigns its own paid employees as additional teachers and staff. Other registered religious groups have the right to establish schools as long as they meet accreditation standards.

The constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion. Private religious radio stations are forbidden from airing political broadcasts.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The MTA stated it did not approve pending applications nor accept new applications for registration from religious groups because draft legislation regarding religious freedom had not passed. The MTA presented the new regulation on worship practices to the Council of Ministers in September 2015. The government said it was drafted with a view to guaranteeing freedom of worship while respecting the communities in which religious groups were based. The council did not act on the proposal by the end of the year.

Unregistered religious groups were able to continue their religious activities while awaiting registration. The MTA continued to report religious groups faced obstacles such as obtaining building permits for places of worship. The ministry stated, however, this was not because they were religious groups but because applying for a building permit required at least a six-month waiting period for any applicant. Observers reported that officials routinely granted religious groups' requests for permission to conduct nighttime celebrations.

The government generally recognized Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic religious holidays as official national holidays. Only religious leaders from those three groups were invited to government events. For example, during the opening ceremony for the October African Union Maritime Summit, the government invited leaders from these three groups to give opening prayers.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the Directorate for Religious Affairs, disputes continued to erupt when new churches established themselves in neighborhoods, particularly those led by religious leaders from Nigeria. Local residents continued to state these

congregations worshiped too loudly, and often late at night, using drums. The MTA continued to receive regular complaints about noise during the year, but was not able to provide specifics on any of the disputes or whether or how they were resolved. These complaints reportedly often focused on evangelical Protestant parishes, led by charismatic leaders who presided over services employing musical instruments and loud praying.

Members of different religious groups continued to invite one another to their respective ceremonies. Marriage between persons of different religious groups remained common.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials met with the MTA during the year to discuss religious freedom. The Ambassador and other embassy officials raised issues of religious freedom and tolerance with Protestant leaders, Catholic bishops, Muslim leaders, traditional chiefs, and civil society organizations. Embassy officials provided literacy training to 300 imams in the Central Region to strengthen their ability to become credible voices in their Muslim communities and to combat hardline messages from foreign clerics. The training highlighted messages of peace and tolerance among all religions.